

YOSEMITE GUIDE

YOUR KEY TO VISITING THE PARK

S U M M E R
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A Walk Through Time

Continued from front cover

Tucked away in Wawona—one of Yosemite’s quieter corners—you’ll find the Pioneer Yosemite History Center, where each building represents a different chapter in Yosemite’s history.

Visitors are encouraged to enter the fascinating world of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center as if they too were pioneers. With the murmur of the Merced River’s South Fork in the background, the clang of a blacksmith’s anvil, and the whinny of nearby horses, it’s easy to imagine life in an earlier era.

WAWONA COVERED BRIDGE

It’s fitting that the old wooden bridge, originally built by Galen Clark, serves as the entrance to the History Center. Clark’s role as one of the original conservationists and innkeepers places him in one of the earliest chapters of Yosemite’s history. After Abraham Lincoln signed legislation in 1864 protecting Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias by creating the Yosemite Grant, Clark was appointed the Guardian of the Grant. Clark’s bridge, however, didn’t resemble the covered bridge we cross today. After the Washburn family bought Clark’s Station and converted it to the Wawona Hotel as seen today, they covered the rough-hewn bridge in 1879 in the tradition of their New England origins.

WHO WAS GEORGE ANDERSON?

Nestled away in the northwestern corner of the History Center is the simple cabin of George Anderson, built in the 1870s. Anderson, a Scottish sailor, gold-seeker, and jack-of-all trades, represents the early pioneers and settlers of the area. Although he was one of the first trail-builders of Yosemite and the local blacksmith, he is most remembered as the first person to reach the summit of Half Dome. Although many had tried to scale the summit before him, Anderson laboriously drilled holes for spikes all the way to its peak. Following the entrepreneurial spirit that energized many of Yosemite’s first settlers, Anderson soon began charging for tours to the top.



In 1879, this cabin was built upon the Hodgdon homestead in Aspen Valley. Like other buildings at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center, it was moved to its current site near the covered bridge.

Photo by G. Born



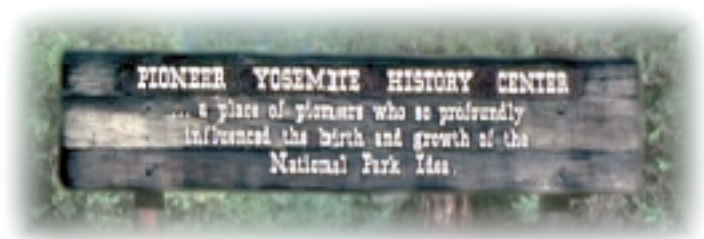
A horse soldier could go anywhere, so it was logical to call upon the U.S. Cavalry to patrol national parks before the creation of the National Park Service in 1916.

HOMESTEADING CONFLICT

The Hodgdon cabin represents the role of the homesteaders, a controversial chapter of Yosemite’s history. Homesteaders claimed a portion of the Yosemite area under the stipulations of the Homesteading Act of 1864. The Hodgsons owned a ranch in the Sierra foothills and claimed a section of land near Yosemite as summer pasture. The Hodgsons, along with other pioneer families, opposed John Muir’s efforts to create Yosemite National Park, believing that it would erode their rights as property owners. After building the only two-story cabin in the region, and creating a summer home, the Hodgsons feared that the creation of Yosemite National Park would undermine their homesteading efforts.

U.S. CAVALRY CABIN

After Yosemite National Park was established in 1890, the U.S. Cavalry took up the role of “acting Superintendent,” becoming Yosemite’s first park rangers. (The National Park Service would not be created until 1916.) A force of 120 horse-soldiers would leave their post at the Presidio in San Francisco,



The establishment of the Yosemite Grant in 1864 laid the foundation for national parks. This story is memorialized at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center in Wawona.

spending the summer patrolling the park, building trails, and stocking the lakes with fish.

STAGECOACH COLLECTION

The Pioneer Yosemite History Center also houses a collection of restored and authentic stagecoaches, representing early travel to the Yosemite region.

After a train-ride from San Francisco to the terminus in the small foothill town of Raymond, Yosemite was still a two-day ride by stage. The stage trip was a bruising one, and one which left passengers covered with a fine coat of dust. The stage drivers were literally the “Kings of the Road,” commanding respect from all their passengers as they

navigated the rocky roads, the hair-pin curves, and dealt with the occasional bandits along the route.

HISTORY COMES ALIVE


A blacksmith heats up iron and demonstrates a nearly forgotten art. Two sisters fetch water from the pump. A Wells Fargo clerk checks her watch, waiting for the stage to arrive. Visitors who really wish to experience a journey back into Yosemite’s past can climb aboard a horse-drawn wagon and see what our predecessors endured in order to travel to the wonders of Yosemite.

The inspiration for the Pioneer Yosemite History Center came when the flood of 1955 nearly destroyed the covered bridge. The National Park Service decided to restore it and create the Pioneer Yosemite History Center to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Yosemite Grant (which in 1864 marked the beginning of the formal concept of establishing national parks in America).

The History Center is an outstanding example of a joint effort in preserving the heritage of the national parks. This cooperative effort includes businesses, non-profit organizations, and individual volunteers. Craftsmen trained in the preservation of historic structures use historic materials and methods to maintain the buildings’ structural integrity and historic authenticity.

The History Center’s living history program runs throughout the summer on Wednesday through Sunday afternoons. During this time you will find several of the buildings staffed by dedicated volunteers in costume who assume the roles of Yosemite pioneers.

The Pioneer Yosemite History Center is located in Wawona, about 4 miles from the park’s South Entrance along the Wawona Road, and is just a short walk from the Wawona Store parking lot. It is always open and interpretive brochures are available.

 Jeff Lahr is a seasonal ranger in Wawona. During the school year, he teaches art and history at Paulding Middle School in Arroyo Grande, CA.

TO LEARN MORE...

- Beginning June 28, come watch the living history portrayals of Yosemite’s early pioneers, Wednesday through Sunday. See page 14 for details.
- Ask your stage driver, Burrell, how long it takes to ride from San Francisco to Yosemite. Stage rides take place Thursday through Sunday. See page 14 for details.
- Read *Yosemite’s Historic Wawona*, by Shirley Sargent, available at bookstores throughout the park.

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